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General Smuts's Message to South Wales



Speech delivered at Tonypany, Rhondda, on October 29, 1917

W. P. Nicholas, Clerk to Rhondda District Council, Presided

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GENERAL SMUTS'S MESSAGE TO SOUTH WALES

GENERAL SMUTS, who was received with loud and prolonged cheering, said: "Mr. Nicholas, ladies and gentlemen, I thank you from the bottom of my heart for the reception which you have given me here to-night. I was invited to attend and address a meeting at Tonypany, and instead of having a meeting, this has turned out—from Cardiff to here—one of the greatest demonstrations I have ever seen in my life. (*Applause.*) Ladies and gentlemen, I thank you for what I have seen, and, I may add reverently, I thank God for what I have seen, because I have seen that the heart of Wales beats true. (*Applause.*) After three years of the agonising loss and suffering caused by this war, the hearts of this little Nation beat true. The hammer strokes of fate have not made you falter, but they have proved your metal. (*Cheers.*) Just eighteen years ago, I left Pretoria to go into another war. That war lasted for three years. For three years I was, figuratively speaking, up to my neck in it. The position I took up, and still take up, is that that war was a war for freedom. It was a war of a small Nation against the biggest Nation in the World. We fought to the bitter end (*Cheers*), until all our men, women and children were either in the field or in concentration camps at home or overseas, and then we gave in. We lost our liberty, but we soon got our liberty back again. (*Cheers.*) By God's Providence what seemed to be lost to us was restored to us in a very short number of years, and, when that great result had been achieved, I never thought I would spend another three years in waging the same struggle over again. Over three years ago, I had again to leave Pretoria in connection with this great struggle, and in these last three years, I think I have covered—if I may

refer to myself—as large a territory as any man who has fought in this war. (*Cheers.*) And to-night I have come to Wales to speak to you, not because I think it is necessary, because I am already convinced that it is not necessary to address any great exhortations to you. You know your duty, and I know you will do it. (*Cheers.*)

“Wales has done her duty from the very first days of the war. When war broke out, you did not wait for compulsion. Your young men came forward by the tens of thousands, I might almost say by the hundreds of thousands—your young men went on that hard, difficult road of duty, and there they are to-day, with eyes set to watch the sun emerge to that great destiny which is in store for us all. (*Cheers.*) You who have remained behind, the women, the children and the older men, have done your best to be worthy of those heroes who fought at Mametz Wood and beyond Ypres, and under the most appalling losses did their duty to the citizens of this Empire and did their duty to you, and I know you are prepared to do your duty. (*Cheers.*)

“In this, the fourth year of the war, the strain is becoming very great, not only on you, but on the people all over the world. After all, our nerves are only made of flesh, and the sufferings, the losses—the appalling losses—and the sores of this war are being borne in on us more day by day. Therefore I do not wonder that it is now being asked in all places ‘What are we fighting for?’ and ‘What are our prospects of achieving these things we are fighting for?’ Ladies and gentlemen, I consider these to be very proper and fair questions; so when the National War Aims Committee asked me to address meetings in England, Wales and Scotland, I agreed to do so. I consider it is part of the war to consider what we are fighting for, and what hopes we have of achieving our ends. I have come to speak to you on these questions in a plain, simple way. We are all in the same struggle, we sink or swim together, and I think that we should consult together and see what true light there is to be thrown on this matter which is weighing on our lives and consciences. I remember, years

ago, people talking about the great war that was coming, people talking about the great Armageddon that was coming, but did any human being or any nation foresee that such a tragedy would overrun the earth? No, no human being foresaw that; no one ever even dreamt of it. We have all made mistakes, but I will tell you who made the greatest mistake. It was made by the German Government and the German General Staff. They thought that, at this time of the day, at the beginning of the twentieth century, you could wage a war of the old type—a military war. They thought that they could accumulate a large army, and that they could accumulate a large supply of huge guns, and when they were perfectly ready and prepared, and when their neighbours were asleep, they could spring on them like a tiger, and achieve victory and mastery over the whole world.

“Well, we have all made mistakes, but the greatest mistake of this war was when the German Government and the German General Staff, before the war, believed in a military war. It has not turned out to be a military war; it has been a war not of armies, not of nations, but a war of systems, a war of ideals, a war of the souls of the people, and it will be continued on that level. It will not be decided on the armies engaged nor on the battlefields; the true battlefield is in the souls of the nations. (*Applause.*) The true cause, the true issues, are the great principles on which human society and progress rest, and, when victory is ultimately achieved, you will find that it will not be a military victory, it will not be a victory of armies, but it will be a great moral victory—a victory of principle, which will form a new foundation for human progress after this war is decided. (*Cheers.*) Yes, that has been the most fundamental mistake that they have made, and it is for you to make sure that that mistake will cost them the issue of this war. You have an Empire—and when I address you here to-night, you must bear in mind I do not speak to you as one of your ordinary leaders, or as one of your politicians. I have nothing to do with the domestic politics of the United Kingdom; I stand as a representative of the

great Society of Nations that composes the British Empire. (*Applause.*) And you in Wales, and you in Tonypandy, concern me only as far as these great issues are concerned—these issues on which the future of the Empire, the future of the world depend. (*Cheers.*) What is the basis of the British Empire? It is liberty (*Cheers*), it is constitutional Government, and it is freedom. (*Cheers.*) You are not banded together by a great army, you are not banded together by a Government with extraordinary powers, you are spread all over the world, you are living in all climes, and you are held together by your communications over these Continents. The real principle on which you exist is the principle of self-government conceded to every part of the British Empire, or, where not already conceded, to be conceded more and more in the future. (*Cheers.*) That is the principle, good for you not only in your Government but in your private lives. In your ordinary industrial concerns you want freedom. You do not want to be slaves, you do not want to be dictated to, you want security, you want freedom and you want self-government in your industrial life in Wales, and these principles on which the British Empire exists are the principles which we want to see triumph. (*Applause.*) You want the human individual not to be merely a means to an end, you do not want the human individual to be exploited, you do not want individuals for self-aggrandisement, but you want them to develop and reach the highest that they are capable of reaching. That you can only attain by relying on the principle of liberty.

“As against that you have another system to-day, working in the world with great success—that is the principle on which Germany stands. In Germany you have not self-government, you have not freedom. In Germany these things are looked on as mere clap-trap. In Germany the whole system is to develop power, to make the human individual serve the State. You can train your young men as soldiers, as members of a military organisation, you can take possession of the souls of your people, you can try to amass together the largest amount of power for the Nation

as such. That is the German system, that is the German principle—not liberty, not freedom, not righteousness. The will to power is the ideal that dominates the German system, and you know under our modern conditions what an enormous power can be developed by a State under the conditions which exist there. At the present time, you have the State able to grip every individual, and to deal almost with his conscience. It can deal with his body, and, in fact, deal with him in almost every way possible. That has been the German system. The German system has been to train the citizen as a band of the State, not as a free soul, not as a citizen. After you have done that, you will have a huge power, which you can direct against any point, and their plan has been to get the mastery of the world by means of that huge power. Those are the two principles which are contending against one another in the world. This war is not about territories, this war is not about any small issues, the things we see mentioned in the newspapers are not the real underlying principles of this war. This is a spiritual war; it is a moral war. (*Applause.*) You see to-day the agonies of a dying world; it is an appalling tragedy which has come over mankind, the like of which has never been seen in history before; you see the whole world perishing. That is God's providence. Perhaps it is better so. I ask you what world is going to arise on the ruins of this world? What is the new order to be? Is it going to arise on the principles of freedom, on the principles of liberty of the Nations small and large? Is it going to arise on the principles of self-government all round in the concerns of men, or is the foundation to be laid by these principles of force, by the principle of the will to power on which Germany stands? That is the choice before the world to-day; that is the choice before each of us to-day. We have to choose, when thinking over this great trouble, what is going to be the future of the world, and what is going to be the future of our own Empire. As I was coming up the street to-night and I saw all those bright-faced young people by the thousand running along and singing their songs, I thought that, with the help of God, we should never allow that they

should become slaves and a means to wage other wars. (*Applause.*) We will not allow that. This issue has not been raised by us; this war has not been our doing. We have been dragged into it. You people know that there was not the slightest intention on the part of the people or on the part of the Government of the people to start this war. They did their best to keep out of it, but they have been dragged into it, and now, in the fourth year of this war, it is becoming more clear than ever that this is a war between God and the Devil. (*Applause.*)

"This is a war between ultimate principles. Now has to be decided whether we will live free lives, or whether we will be dragooned on the principles of the drill sergeant, on the principles of militarism and on the principles of tyrannous Governments. That is the issue. We will not rest—I, for one will not rest (*applause*)—we will not rest until that issue has been decided, because never again do we want to see such a tragedy overwhelming mankind; never again would we like to see brute force tyrannise over the weak. Now that the issue has been raised by the enemy we will keep him to it until the end comes, and he disgorges what he has seized by his illegal methods. (*Applause.*) Germany to-day sits with a big war map, which she developed by that power, which she developed by careful preparation, by careful study in advance and careful staff work. She developed all that enormous power which enabled her at the beginning of the war to overrun large parts of Europe, and she sits to-day with large parts of Europe, she sits with large parts of Belgium, with large parts of France, large parts of Russia, large parts of Roumania, Serbia, and I do not know what besides. She did the planning and preparation in advance, and she sits to-day with these territories. When we talk of peace and what our war aims are, we want to see that war map of Germany become a scrap of paper. (*Applause.*) It shall be far more of a scrap of paper than was that 'Treaty' which protected Belgium. We want to see her disgorge every inch of territory she has occupied in this war, because it must be made clear to the men and women of this generation and to the men and

women of the generations to come after us, that this wrong is not going to pay, that this crime against the peaceful progress of Europe is not going to pay Germany.

"That is truly the law of justice, and that law shall prevail, and we will continue the war until that wrong done to Belgium and the other countries is undone, until the war map disappears, and until we know that she will not get the spoils of her so-called successes, that she will be left at the end of this war without an inch of the territory she has occupied. (*Applause.*) That is the only way of dealing with militarism, with Prussianism. There is no use working at it on abstract principles. People believe in facts, and if you want to get it into the heads of the German people, and thereby into the skull of the Government, that militarism does not pay, that this system of drilling your nation to pounce on their neighbours does not pay, the only thing is to make them see that after three years of war, after four years of war, or even after five years of war they will lose every bit of country they have taken by their scheming and planning. That I think we must make up our minds on.

"I have spoken in the same way before. After the meeting which I addressed in Sheffield, somebody wrote to me and said: 'I agree with you, but the German people are prepared to agree to that, they have passed a resolution in the Reichstag that they will have peace without annexations and without indemnity.' Now, ladies and gentlemen, let us make no mistake about this peace. A resolution was passed in the German Reichstag, but that resolution nobody understands. The German papers—if you have to read them, as unfortunately I have to do from day to day to see what the other side thinks—the German papers since July last are fighting for the meaning of this resolution. The Government never accepted it. The Chancellor said: 'I have no objection to it as I understand it.' (*Laughter.*) Well, of course, there are many ways of understanding a vague formula like that. I say that we are not going to be humbugged again, after all our sufferings and all our efforts, and after all this agony which has weighed down mankind for the last three years. We are going to look to strict busi-

ness; we are not going to speculate on what the Reichstag meant. We want it from them officially. We want from them officially a peace offer in which they say: 'We are prepared to evacuate all the countries we have occupied.' That would be business. Then the people in this country and the Allies will know where they are. When the war map is withdrawn, when they say that they will have no annexations, and they invite us to a peace conference, on that basis we will meet them. That means business, but not until then. (*Applause.*)

"I want this war map smashed in the first place, because it will mean justice. It will mean that the spoliator will not reap any spoils, and it will mean that it will be brought home to their people that militarism or Prussianism does not pay. Those are the two concessions I want them to make and then the position will be entirely different from what it is to-day. (*Applause.*) I am not convinced at all in my own mind that the German Government have accepted that formula of the Reichstag. You know that the German Parliament is not like our Parliament. Parliament in Germany is much more of a debating society character than is our Parliament, and its resolutions are of a much more pious character than are the resolutions in our Parliament. I do not know whether this meeting at Tony-pandy to-night does not carry more weight with the English Government than the resolutions of the Reichstag do with the German Government. (*Laughter.*) That war map must go, but side by side with that war map another war map has appeared, of much more significance to the world. While Germany has been stamping on the small nations, while she has in the most ruthless and cruel manner applied her submarines to the murder of innocent women and children, the world has looked on, and the world has a conscience. The German General Staff did not know it; they thought it was a military question, but in this there is the question of so many consciences, and alongside the map of occupied German territory you have another of extraordinary significance to the future of the world—that is the map of all the countries of the world that have gone

into the war against Germany. Nothing like it has been seen in the history of the world. Nations whose traditions were peaceful, nations who never dreamt of getting into this war, nations whose policy has been founded, like the United States of America (*Applause*), for more than one hundred years on the principle that they would hold aloof from the affairs of Europe, on the principle laid down in the Monroe Doctrine that they would not interfere with the affairs of Europe, have at last come in, and say that it is not the business of Europe, it is the business of human conscience and the moral order of the universe, and no man or woman can stand aside when issues are being settled that will affect the future, not of Europe, but of the whole world. (*Applause*.)

"So you have to-day against Germany almost the whole of the world. If you take an atlas, and mark on it the countries that are not at war with Germany, with Austria, with Bulgaria, with Turkey, and with the Devil (*Laughter*), you will find that they are very small patches indeed. Practically the whole of the Universe is at war with that combination of five which I have just mentioned. Now, that is of extreme significance, and that is going to settle this war in the end. Because what does it mean? These Nations have not rushed in for gain. America has not come in for gain, she has everything to lose and nothing to gain, she wants nothing in Europe, and the same with many other countries that have come into this war, they feel that there is a moral issue.

"That great war map of all Germany's enemies is very significant, because it shows that in this immoral world, in this selfish world, in this self-aggrandising world, this is beginning to tell, and you have the beginning of the future Government of the world. You have in this system now arising the principle of the moral law recognised more than ever before in the Government of Nations and of men. I consider that this war map is of great significance on that ground, but it is of even greater significance in another way. What has Germany to look forward to, supposing she goes on with this war? What is going to hap-

pen? Germany is out for world trade, for world empire. What good will it be if in the end the whole world is against her? After she is cut off from the rest of the world, cut off, isolated in the centre of Europe, what good will it be? And the German people are beginning to realise that. If they do not realise the moral issue, they realise that the economic issue is at stake, and they see that her whole future is compromised, and that the rest of the world may cast her adrift. How will she recover her economic position in the world? About the future I have no doubt, but that one war map must go, and the other will settle this war. (*Applause.*)

"Your armies are at present fighting with extreme bravery at the Front, experiencing hardships and suffering, but they are not all-important. There are other factors to be considered. This is not a war of armies; this is not a military war. In the end this war will be decided on the moral forces set going in this war, which are far stronger than any army, artillery or munitions of war. The one war map must go, and the other war map will make it go. In the meantime, you will have ups and downs, make no mistake about that. You will have military ups and downs during the course of this war. I have noticed to-day a certain amount of misgivings about what is happening in Italy. Do not lose your heads, do not lose your sense of proportion; these are but small things. Italy will be all right in the end. (*Loud Cheers.*) Our sympathies go out to her in her hour of trouble, and more, our strong arm will go out to her in her trouble, and you will find, in the end, that this grave danger which is threatening Italy may not only be turned off, but may be turned into an instrument which will help us to beat the enemy. (*Applause.*) It will not help Germany on to victory. That you may be certain of. Do you remember that, in the autumn of 1915, Serbia was overwhelmed in a similar way by Germany and Austria. Has that helped Germany in the least towards victory? In the following autumn, Roumania was overwhelmed by Germany; did that help Germany to victory? Now they are trying to overwhelm Italy. Can that help them to vic-

tory? It can only have one effect, and that is to prolong the war. Who is going to suffer most from the prolongation of the war? I have no hesitation in saying Germany. If there is one thing more than another the German and Austrian people are grovelling for, it is peace. Peace they want as soon as possible. You have no idea, not even a suspicion, of what they are suffering in these countries. A thick veil is drawn over it. Even neutrals are not allowed now into Germany. I am told that Germans only under the very strictest conditions are allowed to go to neutral countries bordering on Germany. The whole idea is not to let the world know what is passing.

"If the world sometimes appears dark to us, and we feel the strain and oppression, the other side feels it much more. They cannot stand the strain, and these little victories over Serbia, Roumania, and Italy can only prolong the war and prolong the agony of Germany and her Allies. The war, so far as the military war is concerned, will be decided in the main theatre, and that is on the Western Front. (*Applause.*) Germany cannot win on the battlefield unless she can beat the British Army, the French Army, and the American Army. Does she show much chance of doing that? (*A voice: No.*) You ask those brave men—those brave Welshmen who stormed Mametz Wood; ask those brave men who, since July 31st, have been conquering the impregnable positions of the enemy, hitherto unknown in the history of the world. Ask the French Army. The military predominance in the war is entirely on our side. It is because Germany knows that, and knows that she has no chance on the field of battle that she goes to the side-issues. (*Laughter.*) Hammer Russia. Poor Russia! That is the thing. She is like a patient in hospital suffering from fever, she is not in her right mind, but she will be right by and by. (*Applause.*) Hammer Russia. Hammer Italy, because she is not strong enough to stand the assault of the combined German and Austrian Armies. That will not help them. They may have temporary success, but that will not help in winning the war. We are

fighting the war in the theatre in which it is to be won, and may God help us to win it. (*Applause.*)

"Therefore, I say: 'Do not be disheartened with any news you get.' The big forces, the invisible forces, the people of the universe, the soul and conscience of mankind are all fighting on your side. They appeal to you to be strong in yourselves. After all, to us of this generation has come this great chance, which seldom comes to man; to you, to me, to the Allied Nations has come the call to jump into the breach, and shall we forsake our duty and stand aside? Dark though the night be, yet until the day dawns we are not going to give in. (*Applause.*) If we are deemed worthy in the course of history to stand in that breach to fight for liberty against the greatest odds the world has ever seen, then let our bodies lie there, but we will not give in, because there is one thing we are after, and that is that this shall never be repeated, and that no Government, however powerful, shall have the courage to try a similar deed against the peace of mankind again. No, we are not going to give in—not until we have established the world on the new basis. Under the new basis let us have no more standing armies. The young manhood of the nations should no longer be sacrificed to the Moloch of war. We do not want standing armies to weigh as a heavy incubus on the economic resources of the nation. We want, however, development, we want all our energy, we want all our power exploited, to the development of our economic resources. As long as you have militarism, as long as you have standing armies and these powers, poor suffering mankind will never see that development. If you want a better England, if you want a better Wales, and if you want a better Tonypandy, then let us win victory first. You are not isolated any longer. We thought we could live alone in this little Island here, but now we have found that what affects one nation affects another, and this war has brought home to us how the plans of Germany have affected the whole world. Therefore, no real progress can be made in your own economic and industrial developments until we have this matter of peace settled. (*Applause.*)

"No more standing armies and armaments! It is hopeless to think, or to expect, that the future peace of the world can be maintained while nations pile up huge armaments and build up great armies, armaments that are paid for by the blood of the citizens, and which are used for the slaughter of the citizens. Now that we are deemed worthy by Providence to carry this through, we will fight it out to the very end. (*Applause.*)

"There is one matter I would like to refer to, ladies and gentlemen, because it is always close to me, and it is always close to your hearts, and that is the cause of the little nations. You are a little nation who have stood by your traditions, who have stood by your language, and have stood by your national type. You have done your best to develop it. All over the world you have small peoples who have not been crushed by the mighty Empires, but are, as it were, in the process of being absorbed by this cobra. I thought that was going to happen to my country, but it turned the other way because we put up a fight, which showed the British Empire there was more than Empires at stake. I want one of the objects of this war to be the establishment of small nations. Why should we all be bloated Empires? If you have the equality we all desire, there will be no difference between small and great. The small will continue to develop and add great variety and gaiety to the minds of nations.

"I shall not detain you any longer (*Cries of 'Go on'*), nor do I think it is necessary to address an appeal to you. The mind of Tonypandy is as clear as water to me to-night. I can see what you are after. You are at the very point you were at in August, 1914. The same determination, the same resolution, perhaps wiser and more determined to see the thing through, because you have seen the sufferings of the nations of the earth. Therefore, I do not think it necessary to make any special appeal to you. I would say that, after all, we count for very little, our lives are very short; all of us have only a few years before us, and when we go to the Valley of the Great Shadow we will not take any riches with us, not even our dear grievances

can we take with us. We can, however, leave behind us one thing—a record to our children which will make their backs grow straighter. (*Loud Applause.*) We can make them remember us with gratitude as those to whom the call of duty came, and came not in vain, and, as you responded in the past, you and all the peoples of the British Empire will continue to respond to the very end, to consider your lives cheap, to consider your efforts cheap, and to consider everything cheap so long as right can be advocated, so long as you know that there will be a chance to live for the nations to come. When you have achieved that for yourselves, remember that you will have achieved it for the world, and the Germans themselves will thank you for having achieved it, because there are many of them to-day who would thank you for having attained victory if they could speak out their hearts. We have been fighting not for ourselves, but for the highest ideals of the human race. When we talk of war let us think of that.

“I look on this war as a moral crusade. It did not begin like that, but you know the transformations that took place; perhaps, however, the greatest transformation of all that has taken place is that the war which began as a great military war is now a great moral and spiritual crusade, and the nation strongest in the military sense is the weakest of all because she has the least moral stock. Will you stand firm? Will you last it out? You will not give in, and I will tell you that, as sure as I stand here, victory is assured for the Allied cause and those great principles which we are fighting for.” (*Loud and prolonged Applause.*)